

# PUBLIC SAFETY



PRESS RELEASE

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Fire Marshal Warns About Using Alternate Heat Sources During Winter

**JEFFERSON CITY, October 31, 2005**—Missouri State Fire Marshal Randy Cole announced today that consumers should beware of the safety of alternative heat sources, the number one cause of home fires during the winter months.

“Rising fuel costs this winter has stimulated alternative heat source purchases such as space heaters and wood stoves,” Cole said. “I urge Missourians to use caution and constantly supervise those appliances or the results could be devastating.”

Already this year there are reports of heating fuel costs on the rise for this winter and the sale of wood burning appliances has already increased. Many Missouri families may be seeking other alternative or supplemental heating sources such as portable space heaters and kerosene heaters.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) electric powered portable space heaters are factors in approximately 2,300 fires nationwide resulting in approximately 30 deaths and 180 injuries annually. These fires cause an estimated \$54 million dollars in property damage each year. A heater being placed too close to combustible materials caused almost half of these type fires. In addition, nationwide approximately 45,500 home heating fires occur annually resulting in approximately 200 deaths and 900 injuries.

In 2004, fire departments in Missouri reported 480 fires caused by a heat source placed too close to combustible materials. These Missouri fires caused over 4 million dollars in property loss and resulted in three deaths.

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## **FS ALTERNATIVE HEAT FIRST ADD**

If you plan to use space heaters to help heat your home this winter, follow these safety guidelines provided by Underwriter's Laboratories (UL), Inc.:

- Do not use space heaters to warm bedding, cook food, thaw pipes or dry clothing. Misusing space heaters can put you and your family at risk of fire or burn injuries.
- Select heating equipment that has the UL testing symbol, as it means the device has been tested for foreseeable safety hazards.
- Remember the 3-foot safety zone. Keep things that burn at least three feet away from space heaters.
- Turn off space heaters when you are not in the room or when you go to sleep.
- Supervise children and pets at all times when space heaters are in use. Even the slightest contact with a heating coil or element can cause a severe burn.
- If you have an electric space heater, check for frayed insulation, broken wires or overheating. Replace the broken equipment before using.
- When buying space heaters, look for devices with automatic shut-off features and heating element guards.
- If you have a liquid-fueled space heater, use only the fuel recommended by the manufacturer. Never use gasoline or any other substitute fuel. The wrong fuel could burn hotter than the equipment's design limits and cause a serious fire.
- When refueling, turn off the heater and let it cool down completely before adding fuel. Wipe up any spills promptly.
- If you are considering buying a kerosene heater, check with your local fire department to find out if its use is legal in your community.
- Avoid using extension cords with space heaters. If you must use one, make sure you use the correct wire gauge size and type for the heater.
- Keep the heater's power supply cord away from high-traffic areas in your home.

### **Wood burning safety tips:**

- Wood burning appliances need to be installed according to the manufacturer's guidelines. The appliance must not be located by combustibles, such as curtains, chairs, firewood, etc.
- Local codes may also provide additional installation guidelines or restrictions relating the use and installation of wood burning appliances.
- Wood burning stoves shall be placed on a fire-resistant material. The fire-resistant material shall extend at least 18" in all directions.
- Wood burning stoves shall have a separate flue. A 2" clearance or dead-air space around the flue pipe shall be maintained and make sure the flue pipe does not touch any combustible material.
- Chimneys/flues shall be inspected and cleaned by a professional chimney sweep at the beginning of the heating season. Check the system on a regular basis during the season for creosote buildup.

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## **FS ALTERNATIVE HEAT SECOND AND FINAL ADD**

- Use only proper fuel in the stove; well seasoned, dry wood is best to avoid excess creosote buildup.
- Empty ashes frequently; store outside in a covered metal container.

In addition, furnaces should be checked regularly and cleaned annually, because heaters or furnaces that are dirty, in disrepair or not operating efficiently, may produce carbon monoxide. Cracks in flues, gaps in pipes or improperly vented heating systems are also potential sources to allow carbon monoxide to enter your home. Since carbon monoxide is odorless and tasteless, the use of a carbon monoxide detector is always recommended in any location using any open-flame heat source.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are often confused with the flu. If you suspect the presence of carbon monoxide in your home, you should leave the area and immediately call your local fire department.

Information on the proper use of portable space heaters, wood burning appliances or the dangers of carbon monoxide may be obtained from any local fire department or the Missouri Division of Fire Safety's website at [www.dfs.dps.mo.gov](http://www.dfs.dps.mo.gov). Please contact Terri Durdaller at (573) 751-4819 for more details.

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